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## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COMPANY ON THE BASIS OF SOFT TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT

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The article is concerned with studying the impact of soft components of total quality management (TQM) on the company's environmental and social sustainability. The subject of the research is a set of theoretical, methodical and practical recommendations for implementing the concept of total quality management to ensure sustainable development of a company. The purpose of the article is to theoretically substantiate and develop practical recommendations for identifying the impact of soft TQM on the sustainable development of a company. Achievement of this goal is ensured by fulfilling the following interrelated tasks: to summarise the existing soft TQM practices in the research of scientists, to allocate the features of soft TQM functioning in Ukrainian companies and their success in achieving environmental and social sustainability, to develop recommendations for improving the level of environmental and social sustainability of companies through the implementation of soft TQM practices. The research used general scientific and special methods of cognition: structural-logical, systemic and process approaches, the method of generalisation and comparison, questionnaires, methods of correlation and regression analysis, logical method, method of tabular presentation of data, scientific generalisation. The following results have been obtained: having analysed the work of scientists on the research's subject, the work of the European Foundation for Quality Management, the aspects of TQM that cover the company's business activities, as well as the problems that are specific to each of them, have been identified. To identify the level of implementation of detailed issues, a questionnaire was developed and completed by the heads of 68 Ukrainian companies between November 2022 and March 2023. It included a Likert scale assessment of each of the soft TQM dimensions (business management system, HR practices, continuously evolving processes, leading procurement procedures, stakeholder identification, and product competitiveness) based on 28 statements. Five hypotheses were proposed based on the literature on the research topic and our own analytical developments. The data obtained in the course of the survey were analysed using correlation and regression analyses. The results show that two practices – business management systems and human resource management practices – are related to environmental sustainability, while only the business management system is related to social sustainability. The article provides recommendations for supporting the sustainable development of the company. Conclusions. The study demonstrates the effectiveness of TQM practices in ensuring the sustainability of a company's activities. The business management system affects both environmental and social sustainability of the company. Human resource management practices have a positive impact on environmental sustainability, but not on social sustainability, i.e. organisational factors are key to achieving environmental sustainability. Raising awareness of sustainability is the best way to promote the implementation of procedures that contribute to sustainability. Other TQM practices, such as continuously evolving processes, leading procurement procedures, stakeholder identification, and competitive products, do not affect a company's environmental and social sustainability. The article raises topics for future research: why human resource management practices and continuously evolving processes do not affect sustainability. It is appropriate to deepen the case studies to identify the mechanisms by which TQM practices contribute to both environmental and social sustainability.

**Keywords:** *total quality management, environmental sustainability, social sustainability, stakeholders, product competitiveness.*

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**Formulation of the problem.** One of the most challenging issues in business management is achieving sustainable competitiveness and long-term profitability. Stakeholders usually make demands on companies: they must ensure transparency and responsibility of their business, and increase the level of environmental sustainability. Total quality management is the most common strategic model for companies seeking comprehensive development. With TQM, all functions of the organization can develop with continuous improvement that takes into account the needs of customers and stakeholders, i.e. TQM is a key factor that determines sustainability. In the past, companies paid great attention to economic sustainability, but today business owners are focusing on broader sustainability goals. That is why the proposed research focuses on the impact of soft TQM on company sustainability, especially on environmental and social factors.

With effective sustainability practices, companies can ensure future success and gain competitive advantage. Sustainable operations are based on three principles: environmental integrity, economic prosperity, and social justice. Environmental sustainability takes into account emissions, waste and pollution prevention; social sustainability involves equality, diversity, cooperation and health; financial issues include profit, return on investment and long-term business viability. Sustainable development focuses on the idea of moving toward a just and prosperous world, preserving nature and culture for future generations. Although the concept of sustainable development is widespread, there is a lack of clear understanding of the procedures required to achieve it.

All companies, especially manufacturers, need to pay attention to economic issues and environmental and social sustainability needs. Balancing these priorities is challenging and requires effective management systems that improve environmental, social and economic performance. TQM can be a solution that achieves a balance between these priorities. Companies should invest in sustainability as an element of strategic quality development. TQM contains both soft and hard elements. The European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) provides a list of factors that companies should consider when striving for improvement. The issues EFQM deals with are divided into procedures and results. Procedures include: defining mission, vision and strategy; organizational culture, innovation and leadership; stakeholder engagement; creating sustainable value; and management and production renewal. The results are used to monitor the company's performance indicators. Companies that use TQM can develop sustainability solutions based on their own processes, for example, when choosing an energy source, waste management, human resources management, etc. Internal opportunities for increasing the level of

sustainability include digitalization, mental health, and corporate culture, which do not require large financial contributions.

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** With effective sustainability procedures, companies can ensure future success and gain competitive advantage. Sustainability is based on three principles: environmental integrity, economic prosperity, and social justice [11]. Achieving a balance between these three priorities requires effective management systems that improve environmental, social and economic performance.

According to Usman M. et al. [18], environmental sustainability is achieved through the implementation of renewable and clean energy practices and a green economy. Although the economy is constantly growing, it should be implemented with the maximum degree of sustainability and environmental friendliness. As economic growth accelerates, it is advisable to pay attention to energy consumption and reduce the use of fossil energy. Alharbi K. et al. [1] emphasizes the need to implement cleaner production practices and substantiates its positive impact. In pursuit of financial benefits and sustainability of environmental activities, companies assess the environmental impact of their activities. Based on these assessments, they have been able to develop cleaner production methods. It is worth noting that when companies apply for ISO 14001 certification, they are required to identify the environmental aspects of their activities and initiate measures to reduce the impact of the most significant ones. Marchiori D. et al. [10] proved in their work that stakeholders can also influence the improvement of the company's environmental sustainability. Competitive advantages are achieved by reducing consumption and waste accumulation, as well as by implementing an environmental policy that affects the company's image.

In addition, in order to respond to the ever-increasing number of environmental problems, companies are developing appropriate strategies for developing environmental responsibility. Zbucea A. et al. emphasize [19] that achieving sustainability of environmental activities requires investment by the government and stakeholders, in particular, in environmental information, communication infrastructure, and high-quality education. There is also a growing need to achieve carbon neutrality. This implies a change in global energy policy, as fossil fuels (oil, gas, coal) account for the largest share of global energy consumption. In its medium-term strategy, the United Nations [17] has identified three of the most significant risks to the planet: climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. Responding to these risks requires a transition to more sustainable and equitable operating models, reducing pollution, and living in harmony with nature.

With regard to social sustainability, the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has emerged, which complements the concept of corporate environmental responsibility. Studies [9] have shown that CSR has a positive impact on the company's productivity and value and reduces its risks. Markovic S. et al. [12] studied small and medium-sized enterprises and found that CSR affects the company's reputation, brand, and value. As the size of the company scales, the relationship between corporate social responsibility and business results increases. CSR can be viewed as an investment in the future that increases a company's chances of survival in an increasingly competitive environment. Swaen V. et al. [16] emphasize the need to involve the company's staff in changing the organizational culture and new ways of organizing work. Due to the increasing role of human resource management, its tasks should be defined in the implementation of CSR.

Despite the benefits of sustainable business, its implementation may face challenges. Bakos J. et al. [2] found that barriers to the implementation of sustainable development can be both external and internal. Internal barriers include a lack of resources and management support, while external barriers include weak government support or lack of consumer demand for sustainable products. Shahlan M. et al. [14] studied the barriers faced by companies in the transition to a sustainable development model. They identified 175 barriers, among which the key ones were lack of resources and lack of experience in implementing such initiatives. Bekun F. et al. [3] emphasizes the imperfect market structure, lack of quality logistics, and shortcomings in environmental legislation as challenges to the implementation of sustainable practices. In addition, the influence of customers and competitors encourages companies to implement sustainable business practices. According to Font X. et al [5], in small and medium-sized companies, the personality of the owner-manager often shapes the company's culture, and decision-making includes elements that are not limited to making a profit. In addition to economic factors, the attitude of company owners to sustainable business is influenced by their values and lifestyle.

TQM is a management philosophy that has helped companies succeed in an increasingly competitive environment. The operational benefits of TQM are usually reduced to reducing disruptions and losses, which improves finances and increases the sustainability of operations. TQM improves productivity by providing functional, economic, social, and sustainable benefits [15]. It aims to empower employees, provide insight into customer needs, measure core processes, and minimize business variability. It is used to design company functions to continuously meet customer requirements and improve operating systems to increase profitability and productivity. Successful TQM reduces repetition

and waste, providing significant cost savings, and social sustainability reflects the company's functions that support human well-being. That is why activities should be aimed at maintaining competitiveness, caring for the environment, and adhering to the principles of social responsibility. According to [8], economic success is the main condition for sustainability, and TQM allows to integrate management processes with the goals of environmental and social sustainability. TQM contains both hard and soft elements: various tools or methods of quality management are associated with hard elements, while soft elements are related to operational management procedures. Both types of elements play a significant role in a quality management system, but soft TQM has a greater impact on performance than hard TQM. That is why this research focuses on soft elements.

**The purpose of the article** is to theoretically substantiate and develop practical recommendations for identifying the impact of soft TQM on ensuring sustainable development of a company.

**Research results.** The approaches to measuring the soft elements of TQM are summarized in Table 1. They show that researchers have different visions of TQM, and there is no generally accepted approach to this issue. The soft elements of TQM are based on strategic planning, goals, feedback, management commitment, and employee participation in the development of TQM operations. Based on this, the first dimension of TQM in the study is defined as a business management system. Soft TQM also includes empowerment, collaboration, organizational culture, motivation, commitment, and equality [6]. Based on this, human resource management practices are chosen as the second dimension of TQM. Process management, which includes continuous and systematic monitoring of process performance and material use, is also an important aspect of soft TQM. Procurement management is an important aspect of soft TQM, which covers the management of raw materials, supplier processes and supplier selection [13], so the fourth dimension of TQM is defined as the leading procurement procedure. The last aspect of soft TQM that will be considered in this study covers stakeholder identification, customer satisfaction and expectations, product characteristics and image. That is, the fifth element of soft TQM is stakeholder identification and product competitiveness. EFQM also emphasizes the importance of stakeholders and meeting their needs when implementing effective TQM. Thus, this study is focused on examining whether different aspects of soft TQM affect the sustainability of a company.

All five aspects of TQM in this research are related to sustainability and sustainable development, so it can be noted that the selected dimensions describe the effectiveness of TQM in matters related to the company's

sustainable business. Successful operations require minimal bureaucracy, efficient resource planning, effective management systems, better products, better service, and rapid response to changing needs. The inability to develop such operations may be due to the lack of clear development models, so organizations invest in sustainable development, taking into account strategies for improving their operations. In this way, TQM and sustainability are linked.

Management is an important means of achieving sustainability. Honarpour et al. found [7] that TQM methods, especially strategic planning and human resource management, have a positive impact on the environmental performance of healthcare facilities. Chen C. [4] recommended paying attention to the involvement of management and employees in the TQM implementation processes, as these are important factors that a company should consider when striving for environmental and social sustainability. Organizational governance is key to sustainable operations, and comprehensive training and proper supervision help to increase staff responsibility. One of the guiding principles of TQM is employee engagement, so it is important that employees are empowered, have decent working conditions, and have common goals for their activities. A business management system is essential for achieving environmental and social sustainability. Thus, the author assumes the following:

- business management system has a positive impact on environmental and social sustainability;
- HR practices have a positive impact on environmental and social sustainability;
- continuously evolving processes have a positive impact on environmental and social sustainability;
- leading procurement procedures have a positive impact on environmental and social sustainability;
- stakeholder identification and competitive procurement have a positive impact on environmental and social sustainability.

To test the research hypothesis, a survey of executives of 68 Ukrainian companies was conducted using a Google form. The survey was conducted from November 2022 to March 2023. The survey assessed the views of individual respondents on the functioning of soft TQM in their companies and the company's success in achieving environmental and social sustainability. The questionnaire was developed in accordance with the TQM criteria proposed by EFQM. The soft TQM was assessed by five parameters (28 statements) listed in Table 1, using a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 – strongly disagree, 2 – strongly agree. The reliability of the TQM components was assessed using Cronbach's  $\alpha$  criterion (Table 2). All values exceeded 0.7, so the proposed approach is considered reliable.

Respondents also assessed the environmental and social sustainability of their company. Social

sustainability was defined as equality, staff communication, and compliance with labor laws. When assessing environmental sustainability, the respondents were asked to consider emission limits, compliance with environmental legislation, and waste minimization.

The research examined the relationship between soft TQM and environmental and social sustainability. Table 3 shows the correlation matrix with the mean values and standard deviations of the variables. The linear regression method was used to test the hypothesis.

The results of the regression analysis of the relationships are presented in Table 4. Both models were significant ( $p \leq 0.001$ ). In the environmental sustainability model, the business management system and HRM practices are positive and key factors, while other TQM practices are insignificant. We can state that the business management system and HR practices have a positive impact on the environmental sustainability of the company. In the social sustainability model, the business management system is positive and influential, while the impact of other TQM practices is secondary, i.e., the business management system has the greatest positive impact on social sustainability.

The following conclusions can be drawn from Table 4. The business management system has a significant impact on both environmental and social sustainability. TQM is the most common operating model for integrated development. With the help of TQM, companies can develop their operations through continuous improvement, taking into account the requirements of customers and other stakeholders.

At the company level, sustainability can be supported by integrating environmental issues into human resource management functions, maintaining a coherent organizational identity, and striving to create a transparent organizational culture. Despite the initial expectations of this study, HR practices do not statistically affect social sustainability, even though the questions related to this parameter included cooperation, equality, initiative and competence of the staff. This may be due to the fact that company executives do not view TQM as a complex phenomenon, and also indicate that companies should invest in sustainability as part of strategic operational development.

Continuously evolving processes do not affect the company's environmental and social sustainability. The reason for this may be that companies are more concerned with financial factors, and it is difficult to identify them when improving business sustainability after they have implemented simple solutions. In this case, the development of TQM or business sustainability is not in the focus of companies' activities.

Table 1

**Existing practices of soft TQM in the research of scientists**

The dimension of soft TQM	Criteria	EFQM criteria	Alharbi K. et al. [1]	Fotopoulos C. et al. [6]	Khalil M. et al. [8]	Nazar N. et al. [13]
Business management system	Objective Feedback Responsibilities Support of the management Strategy Risks Information Stakeholder expectations	2.3; 1.4 2.1; 1.4 4.4 1.5; 5.2 1.5 1.3; 1.4 5.1 5.4; 1.2	Commitment of top management Strategic quality planning Evidence-based decision making	Leadership Managing people's results Communication	Commitment of top management Evaluation system	Strategic quality planning
HR practices	Cooperation Equality Initiative  Staff competence	2.3 2.1 2.2; 2.3; 3.2  1.3; 1.4; 2.2; 2.3; 3.2	Human resources development Employee engagement	Empowerment and opportunities Training HR focus	Training Teamwork Organizational trust	Empowerment of employees Training Involvement Teamwork
Continuously evolving processes	Process efficiency Efficiency of operations  Continuous improvement	5.1; 5.2; 5.3 5.2; 5.3  5.2; 5.3	Process orientation Continuous improvement	Quality culture	Continuous improvement	
Leading procurement procedures	Materials and inventory management Supplier reliability	3.5 3.5	Supplier management	Partnerships and resources		Supplier quality management
Stakeholder identification and product competitiveness	Competitive products  Value for money = products meet expectations Identification of stakeholders	4.1  4.4  3.1; 3.3	Customer focus	Customer needs	Customer focus	Customer focus

Table 2

**Research elements and their reliability coefficient**

TQM practice	Statements for evaluation	Loadings	$\alpha$
Business management system	In our organization, we know the goals we are striving for	0.570	0.892
	Management provides feedback to employees when they are successful	0.527	
	I think responsibilities and authority are clearly defined	0.499	
	Management supports the organization in achieving its goals	0.568	
	I think our strategy is clear	0.476	
	We are aware of the risks of our activities	0.476	
	We have significantly expanded our activities	0.458	
	Staff are informed about upcoming changes due to the company's development	0.603	
	Employees are rewarded for success in quality improvement projects	0.538	
	We know what our stakeholders expect from us	0.561	
HR practices	Employees are informed about the importance of following procedures	0.622	0.859
	I think that cooperation within our company is well developed	0.664	
	In our organization, problems are effectively solved on the basis of cooperation	0.743	
	Members of our company are equal partners	0.559	
	I think our approach supports initiative	0.599	
	Our employees are motivated	0.583	
Continuously evolving processes	I believe that our employees have developed competencies	0.416	0.807
	I think our operational processes are efficient	0.645	
	Our processes are efficient compared to our competitors	0.700	
	We systematically look for opportunities to improve our processes	0.466	
Leading procurement procedures	I believe that the management methods we use are effective	0.508	0.733
	Material defects occur very rarely (do not interfere with work)	0.504	
	Availability of materials is not justified	0.519	
	I believe that our suppliers are reliable	0.743	
Stakeholder identification and product competitiveness	The materials we use are easily recognizable	0.613	0.789
	I think our products are competitive	0.609	
	I believe that the price/quality ratio of our products is fair	0.559	
	We have identified our key stakeholders	0.544	

Calculated by the author

Table 3

## Correlation matrix with mean values and standard deviations

TQM practice	Value	Standard deviation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Business management system (1)	3.90	0.585	1						
HR practices (2)	3.88	0.630	0.627	1					
Continuously evolving processes (3)	3.66	0.695	0.636	0.565	1				
Leading procurement procedures (4)	3.92	0.681	0.415	0.391	0.376	1			
Stakeholder identification and product competitiveness (5)	4.21	0.583	0.576	0.486	0.534	0.481	1		
Environmental sustainability (6)	3.16	0.553	0.269	0.241	0.115	0.164	0.134	1	
Social sustainability (7)	3.24	0.547	0.271	0.222	0.222	0.145	0.238	0.463	1

Calculated by the author

Table 4

## Results of the regression analysis

TQM practice	Std. $\beta$	t	R <sup>2</sup>	Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	F
Environmental sustainability					
		8.007	0.111	0.083	4.003
Business management system	0.249	2.617			
HR practices	0.193	2.172			
Continuously evolving processes	-0.081	-0.943			
Leading procurement procedures	0.072	1.034			
Stakeholder identification and product competitiveness	-0.148	-1.837			
Social sustainability					
		7.054	0.129	0.102	4.767
Business management system	0.200	2.124			
HR practices	0.069	0.788			
Continuously evolving processes	0.076	0.890			
Leading procurement procedures	-0.010	-0.151			
Stakeholder identification and product competitiveness	0.031	0.384			

Calculated by the author

Procurement procedures do not directly contribute to business sustainability. This is due to the fact that in some cases companies buy raw materials under customer contracts. This leads to a situation where the manufacturing company does not have the right to make decisions on the choice of suppliers and raw materials at all. In such scenarios, the manufacturing company has to accept the decisions of the customer company, even if it sees that these decisions are not reasonable from a sustainability perspective.

The study found no direct influence of stakeholders on sustainability. The absence of direct dependence is due to the fact that manufacturers have no opportunity to influence the final product, as they supply products

chosen by the customer company. In this case, the only competitive factor is the reliability of supply and the competitive process.

**Conclusions.** The research demonstrates the effectiveness of TQM practices to ensure the sustainability of the organization. The business management system affects both environmental and social sustainability of the company. Human resource management practices have a positive impact on environmental sustainability, but not on social sustainability, i.e. organizational factors are key to achieving environmental sustainability. Raising awareness of sustainability is the best way to promote the implementation of procedures that contribute to

sustainability. Nevertheless, the study did not find a statistical impact of HR practices on social sustainability. This result was unexpected, especially when this aspect included organizational equality, cooperation, initiative and motivation.

Other TQM practices, such as continuously evolving processes, leading procurement procedures, stakeholder identification, and competitive products, do not affect a company's environmental and social sustainability. These factors may not be relevant for Ukrainian companies, as companies differ in their approach to customers. The issues related to business sustainability of a company that manufactures its own products are significantly different from a company that manufactures products to the specifications of its customers.

The research demonstrates the importance of developing and implementing business management system practices. This is because there is no single way to implement TQM or sustainable business models, as each company has to develop its own

systems. Management also needs to consider the fact that TQM functionality and sustainability are not automatically set at a high level when passing certification; accordingly, the performance of operations and processes must be monitored (including the management process) to ensure continuous improvement of operations.

The article raises topics for future research: why human resource management practices and continuously evolving processes do not affect sustainability. It is appropriate to deepen the case studies to identify the mechanisms by which TQM practices contribute to both environmental and social sustainability. Practical procedures should be developed for companies to identify stakeholders, their requirements, and the actions needed to meet their needs – there remains a risk that stakeholders will be discussed by the company's management only to be disregarded in the implementation of operational programs.

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## СТАЛИЙ РОЗВИТОК КОМПАНІЇ НА ЗАСАДАХ М'ЯКОГО ТОТАЛЬНОГО УПРАВЛІННЯ ЯКІСТЮ

Статтю присвячено дослідженню впливу м'яких складових загального управління якістю (TQM) на екологічну та соціальну сталість компанії. Предметом дослідження є комплекс теоретичних, методичних та практичних рекомендацій щодо впровадження концепції тотального управління якістю для забезпечення сталого розвитку компанії. Метою статті є теоретичне обґрунтування та розробка практичних рекомендацій щодо виявлення впливу м'якого TQM на забезпечення сталого розвитку компанії. Досягнення поставленої мети забезпечено виконанням наступних взаємопов'язаних завдань: узагальнити існуючі практики м'якого TQM у дослідженнях науковців, виокремити особливості функціонування м'якого TQM в українських компаніях та їх успіх у досягненні екологічної та соціальної сталості, розробити рекомендації щодо підвищення рівня екологічної та соціальної сталості компаній шляхом імплементації практик м'якого TQM. У ході дослідження використано загально-наукові та спеціальні методи пізнання: структурно-логічний, системний та процесний підходи, метод узагальнення та порівняння, анкетування, методи кореляційного та регресійного аналізу, логічний метод, метод табличного подання даних, наукового узагальнення. Отримано такі результати: проаналізувавши напрацювання науковців за тематикою дослідження, роботи Європейського фонду управління якістю, визначено аспекти TQM, які охоплюють бізнес діяльність компанії, а також проблеми, які характерні для кожного з них. Для виявлення рівня реалізації детальних питань, складено опитувальник, який протягом листопада 2022 року – березня 2023 року пройшли керівники 68 українських компаній. Він передбачав оцінку за шкалою Лайкерта кожного з вимірів м'якого TQM (система управління бізнесом, HR-практики, процеси, що постійно розвиваються, провідні процедури закупівель, ідентифікація зацікавлених сторін та конкурентоспроможність продукції) на основі 28 тверджень. Базуючись на літературі за тематикою дослідження та власних аналітичних розробках запропоновано п'ять гіпотез. Дані, отримані у ході анкетування, проаналізовано за допомогою кореляційного та регресійного аналізів. Результати показують, що дві практики – системи управління бізнесом та практики управління людськими ресурсами – пов'язані з екологічною сталістю, у той час як лише система управління бізнесом пов'язана з соціальною сталістю. У статті подано рекомендації щодо підтримки сталого розвитку ком-



панії. Висновки. Дослідження демонструє ефективність практик TQM для забезпечення сталості діяльності компанії. Система управління бізнесом впливає як на екологічну, так і на соціальність сталість компанії. Практика управління персоналом позитивно впливає на екологічну сталість, однак не на соціальну, тобто організаційні чинники є ключовими для досягнення екологічної сталості. Підвищення обізнаності про сталий розвиток – кращий засіб сприяти впровадженню процедур, які сприяють його забезпеченню. Інші практики TQM – процеси, що постійно розвиваються, провідні процедури закупівель, ідентифікація зацікавлених сторін та конкурентоспроможна продукція – не впливають на екологічну та соціальну сталість компанії. У статті піднято теми для майбутніх досліджень: чому практика управління персоналом та процеси, що постійно розвиваються, не впливають на сталість. Доречно поглибити тематичні дослідження для визначення механізмів, за допомогою яких практики TQM сприяють як екологічній, так і соціальній сталості.

**Ключові слова:** загальне управління якістю, екологічна сталість, соціальна сталість, стейкхолдери, конкурентоспроможність продукції.

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